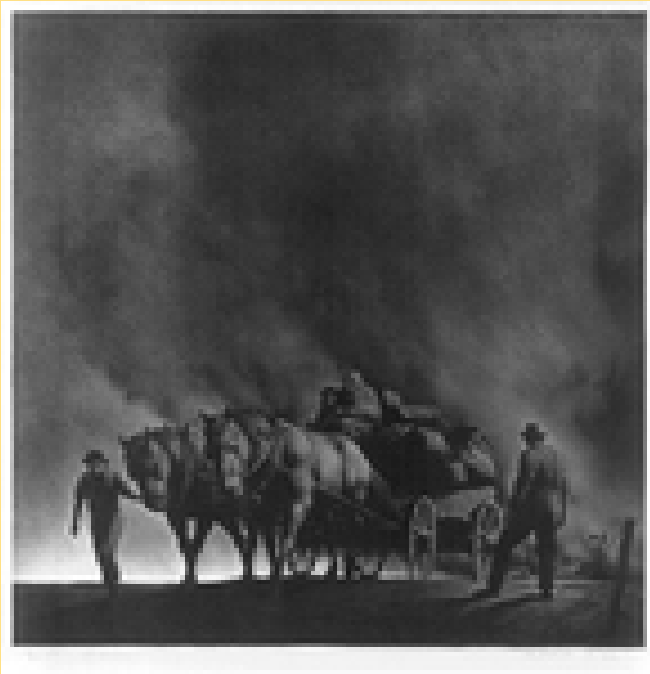


Dust, Drought, Degradation, Desperation & the Great Depression

*A pictorial, musical & historical essay on soil erosion,
its impact on America during the Dust Bowl of the 1930's,
the beginnings of a conservation agency,
and the need for factual natural resource information*



Overworked land combined with drought led to massive levels of soil erosion by wind, calamity and social upheaval on the Great Plains ...

“And then the dispossessed were drawn west -- from Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico ... and Arkansas families, tribes, dusted out, tractored out. Carloads, caravans, homeless and hungry ... a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand.



They streamed over the mountains, hungry and restless -- restless as ants, scurrying to find work to do -- to lift, to push, to pull, to pick, to cut -- anything, any burden to bear, for food. The kids are hungry. We got no place to live ...”

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*



Sunday April 16, 1933
Dust Clouds Rolling Over The Prairies
Stevell Studio, Dodge City, Kansas # 5

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Mrs. Oklahomans reach Calif. via the cotton fields of Ariz.

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“For Americans, the Dust Bowl set the image of the human condition complicated by the problem of soil erosion.”

Douglas Helms, *Agricultural History* 64, 1990



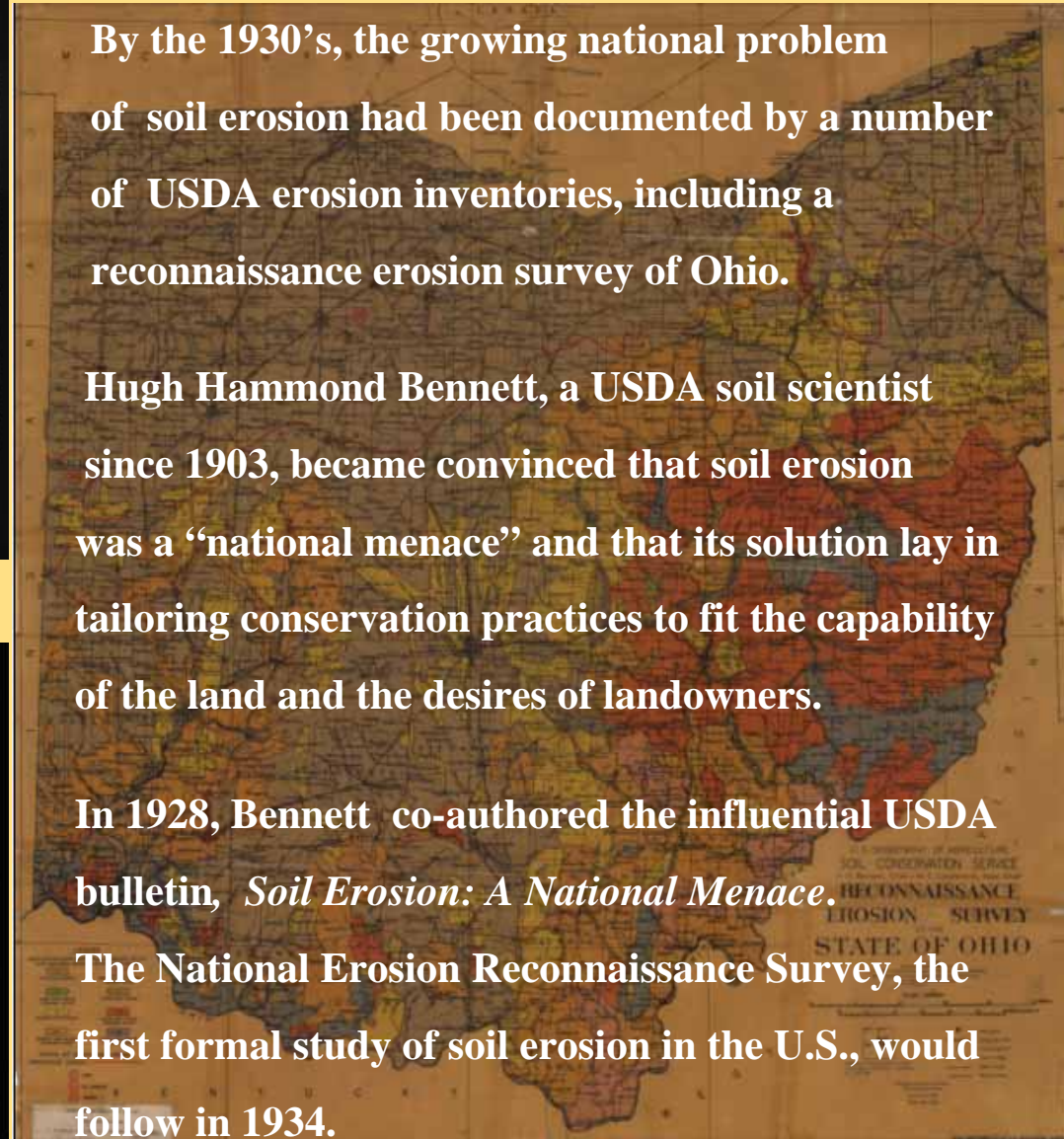


By the 1930's, the growing national problem of soil erosion had been documented by a number of USDA erosion inventories, including a reconnaissance erosion survey of Ohio.

Hugh Hammond Bennett, a USDA soil scientist since 1903, became convinced that soil erosion was a “national menace” and that its solution lay in tailoring conservation practices to fit the capability of the land and the desires of landowners.

In 1928, Bennett co-authored the influential USDA bulletin, *Soil Erosion: A National Menace*.

The National Erosion Reconnaissance Survey, the first formal study of soil erosion in the U.S., would follow in 1934.



Armed with the facts, Hugh Hammond Bennett urged the nation to address the problem of soil erosion.



Combining “science with showmanship” & aided by a dust storm blowing over Washington D.C. during his congressional testimony, he helped establish a new federal, science-based, technical action agency dedicated to conservation and served as its first director in 1933.

The Soil Conservation Service six decades later would become the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Today, thanks to the efforts of farmers & ranchers, aided by NRCS & its conservationists and scientists working to help people help the land, excessive soil erosion has been dramatically reduced in many areas and the environment improved.



And based on Bennett's model, the National Resources Inventory, Soil Survey, Snow Survey, and other resource inventories, *combined with new geospatial technologies*, will continue to provide key information to NRCS in the critical mission to conserve and sustain our natural resources.

**“Back of every great achievement is knowledge.
Back of every successful human undertaking must be
exact data for proper guidance of the enterprise.”**

H.H. Bennett, Chief, Soil Conservation Service, May 1945



**Dust Bowl Photographs primarily from the
Library of Congress
Kansas State University
*National Aeronautics and Space Administration***

***“Dust Bowl Refugees”* written & performed by
Woody Guthrie, Summer 1938**

***“Short Trip Home”* performed by Joshua Bell,
Edgar Meyer, Sam Bush & Mike Marshall**

**Historical information & H.H. Bennett photograph provided by
*USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service***

**Presentation by
Bob Parkinson, State GIS/Resource Inventory Coordinator
Ohio NRCS, 2005**